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<b>14. ABSTRACT</b> Mexico is in chaos and everyone knows it. Since President Calderon took office in 2006 and declared a war on the cartels, 28,000 people have been killed. When compared to a large city like New York the killings are even more telling. For instance, during 2009, Juarez Mexico experienced 133 murders per 100,000 people. During that same period, New York City experienced 6 murders per 100,000 people. The United States (U.S.) should proceed with caution when offering assistance to Mexico. This is due to Mexican perceptions of history associated with U.S. expansion within the context of the Mexican American War. As a result, Mexicans are vehemently opposed to having armed U.S. military personnel within their territory. It is clear that the Mexican military and government need assistance to control the current situation which many believe represents an insurgency. Assuming that Mexico is facing an insurgency, Northern Command (USNORTHCOM) has a role and should leverage existing contacts to offer the Mexican military counterinsurgency training. That said, USNORTHCOM's role would be a supporting one to the Department of State. The object of this effort is to ultimately increase Mexico's stability which would, in turn, increase U.S. security particularly along the Southwest border.							
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**NAVAL WAR COLLEGE  
Newport, R.I.**

**Northern Command: A Relevant and Necessary Partner to Increase Stability in  
Mexico**

**By**

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**A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.**

**The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily  
endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.**

**Signature: \_\_\_\_\_**

**27 October 2010**

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## **Abstract**

Mexico is in chaos and everyone knows it. Since President Calderon took office in 2006 and declared a war on the cartels, 28,000 people have been killed. When compared to a large city like New York the killings are even more telling. For instance, during 2009, Juarez Mexico experienced 133 murders per 100,000 people. During that same period, New York City experienced 6 murders per 100,000 people. The United States (U.S.) should proceed with caution when offering assistance to Mexico. This is due to Mexican perceptions of history associated with U.S. expansion within the context of the Mexican American War. As a result, Mexicans are vehemently opposed to having armed U.S. Military personnel within their territory. It is clear that the Mexican military and government need assistance to control the current situation which many believe represents an insurgency. Assuming Mexico is facing an insurgency, Northern Command (USNORTHCOM) has a role and should leverage existing contacts to offer the Mexican military counterinsurgency training. That said, USNORTHCOM's role would be a supporting one to the U.S. Department of State. The object of this effort is to ultimately increase Mexico's stability which would, in turn, increase U.S. security particularly along the Southwest border.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Mexico is in chaos and everyone knows it. Since 2006, over 28,000 people have lost their lives as a result of drug violence.<sup>1</sup> When compared to Mexico, the U.S. experiences a relatively low crime rate; therefore, high crime rates and homicides are difficult for Americans to appreciate. When comparing homicide rates between Juarez Mexico and New York City, the results are striking. In 2009, Juarez Mexico experienced 133 murders per 100,000 people but during that same period, New York City experienced 6 murders per 100,000 people.<sup>2</sup> Further amplified, over 360 Mexican police have been murdered in just the first six months of 2010.<sup>3</sup> It is abundantly clear that Mexican drug cartels and other criminal enterprises have permeated nearly every facet of Mexican life to include the church, security services, businesses, and the government.<sup>4</sup> Responding to a survey in 2008, 71 percent of the Mexican respondents said that they did not feel safe in their own homes.<sup>5</sup> As a result, many Mexicans remained housebound which also resulted in a cascading national economic problem. Evidence of the deteriorating situation has been felt as close as Phoenix, Arizona with its designation as the second highest kidnapping location in the world and the first in the Americas.<sup>6</sup> Even those within the U.S. military and political establishment recognize the desperate situation facing Mexico, and by extension, the U.S. homeland. The Joint Operating

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Northern Command. *Intelligence Assessment*, (August 2010) 9.

<sup>2</sup> Nick Allen, The UK Telegraph, “Mexican City is Murder Capital of the World”, October 22, 2009, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/centralamericaandthecaribbean/mexico/6409484/Mexican-city-is-murder-capital-of-the-world.html>. (accessed 28 August 2010).

<sup>3</sup> Theresa Firestone, Cory Molzahn, Nicole Ramos, and David Shirk, “Drug Trafficking and Violence in Mexico”, *Trans-Border Institute*, (July 2010): [http://catcher.sandiego.edu/items/peacestudies/TBI\\_FactSheet\\_Narcoviolence10](http://catcher.sandiego.edu/items/peacestudies/TBI_FactSheet_Narcoviolence10) (accessed 19 September 2010)

<sup>4</sup> George W. Grayson, *Mexico: Narco-violence and a Failed State?* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2010), 30-31.

<sup>5</sup> Agnes G. Schaefer, Benjamin K. Bhaney, and Jack Riley, *Security In Mexico: Implications for U.S. Policy Options*, report (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 2009), xv.

<sup>6</sup> Brian Ross, Richard Esposito and Asa Eslocker, *Kidnapping Capital of the USA*, ABC News, 11 February 2009. <http://abcnews.go.com/print?id=6848672> (accessed 28 August 2010).

Environment 2008 addressed Mexican instability, in an unmistakable manner, by declaring that the influence of drug cartels and criminal enterprises as a threat to U.S. national security.<sup>7</sup> Even Hillary Clinton described Mexico's current problem as similar to Colombia's insurgency 20 years ago.<sup>8</sup> Given the unmistakable human dimension (nearly 30 million of Mexican heritage in the U.S.),<sup>9</sup> the financial impact,<sup>10</sup> and the geographical proximity to the U.S., Mexico's instability cannot be viewed solely as a Mexican problem. Given the threat to U.S. national security and interests, action must be taken to assist the Mexican's with their internal security and stability challenges particularly given the negative cross border implications. Actions that should be taken need to be executed using a "whole of government" approach. More than at any other time in our history, policy makers have come to appreciate that problems like the ones faced by Mexico cannot be solved solely with a military solution. Make no mistake, however, the U.S. military, in general, and USNORTHCOM, in particular, have a rightful role in matters like the ones faced by Mexico, but it is limited to a supporting one. This paper will focus on the military's role in matters like this and in Mexico in particular. Given this, U.S. Northern Command (USNORTHCOM) has a definitive role and should provide training to the Mexican military within a Counter Insurgency (COIN) construct to improve stability within Mexico.

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<sup>7</sup> Joint Forces Command, *The Joint Operating Environment 2008; The Contextual World*, 25 November 2008. 34

<sup>8</sup> Ignacio de los Reyes, *Is Mexico at threat from a drug insurgency?*, 9 September 2010; <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-11241147> (accessed 12 September 2010).

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *Hispanic or Latino by Specific Origin-2006-2008*, [http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DTTable?bm=y&-geo\\_id=01000US&-ds\\_name=AC](http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DTTable?bm=y&-geo_id=01000US&-ds_name=AC) (accessed 10 September 2010).

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *Top Trading Partners; Surplus, Deficit, Total Trade*, September 10, 2010. <http://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/top/index.html#2010> (accessed 10 September 2010), Mexico is the U.S.'s third largest trading partner valued at 305 million USD annually.

This report is broken into five major parts that include understanding the operating environment as applied to Mexico. Next an analysis will be conducted that aligns the Mexican situation with the characteristics of an insurgency. Thirdly, counterarguments will be addressed and rebutted. Fourthly, recommendations will be presented and lastly a conclusion will be offered. This exposition fully appreciates that the USNORTHCOM is but one element when applying the “whole of government” approach to this issue. Given that understanding, this report will focus solely on USNORTHCOM’s actions relative to the mitigation of Mexican instability.

### **UNDERSTANDING THE OPERATING ENVIRONMENT**

The relationship between Mexico and the U.S. has not engendered trust between the two nations for reasons well chronicled and traced back to the Mexican American War (1846-1848). During that period, the U.S. desired to expand territories which was manifested by invading Mexico and culminated with the near total defeat of Mexican forces. Following the war, the U.S. and Mexico signed the Treaty of Guadalupe which resulted in relinquishing territory to include New Mexico, Texas, Arizona, Colorado, Utah, Nevada, and California to the U.S.<sup>11</sup> In return, the U.S. compensated Mexico with 15 million USD. The value of the ceded Mexican territory in 2010 dollars is difficult to estimate,<sup>12</sup> but this issue is certainly one that has been the subject of much angst between the U.S. and Mexico. Ratification of that treaty ended the war but trust between the two nations would never be the same. Normally, a recitation of this kind of history would be of little value, but, in this instance, it is critical in order to gain a full appreciation of Mexican perspectives and the operating

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<sup>11</sup> Peace, Friendship, Limits, and Settlement, *Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo*, 2 February 1848 .

<sup>12</sup> Lawrence H. Officer and Samuel H. Williamson, “Purchasing Power of Money in the United States from 1774 to 2009” *Measuring worth*, 2010. <http://www.measuringworth.com/ppowerus/> (accessed 28 August 2010).

environment. The importance of the trust will be highlighted later, especially when addressing methods used to communicate with the Mexican military.

While trust between Americans and Mexicans is not ideal, it is critical to note that trust between the Mexican people and security forces is even more problematic. For instance, during 2008, President Felipe Calderon ordered the arrest of over 300 corrupt police officers in an effort to crack down on drug trafficking.<sup>13</sup> The arrests at that time were significant but not totally surprising. So significant was and is the security problem that President Calderon uses the Mexican military as a force of choice instead of other security agencies.<sup>14</sup>

According to a Rand Corporation report in 2009, an astounding 80 percent of the Mexican population believes the police are corrupt.<sup>15</sup> There are also organizational problems that demanded that the Mexican Army be used as an option to traditional domestic police forces. For instance, security is split between eight different security agencies.<sup>16</sup> Not unlike issues that confront military establishments from time to time, Mexican security forces lack a unified commander and therefore a unified vision.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, just like some militaries, and because of the absence of a unified security vision, many of the eight different security organizations lack a prioritized list of tasks. Unfortunately, there are a total of 1,661 separate policing institutions that matriculate from the eight major security organizations.<sup>18</sup> To date, there is no evidence that would suggest Mexico has taken meaningful steps to address the sheer number of policing entities although there has been some discussion as of late. This is

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<sup>13</sup> Chris Hawley and Sergio Solache, USA Today, "Mexico Focuses on Police Corruption," February 5, 2008, on-line newspaper production. [http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2008-02-05-mexico-police\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2008-02-05-mexico-police_N.htm) (accessed 28 August 2010).

<sup>14</sup> Agnes G. Schaefer, Benjamin K. Bhaney, and Jack Riley, *Security In Mexico: Implications for U.S. Policy Options*, report (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 2009), 4

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 4

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 15

<sup>18</sup> Shelley de Botton, *Mexican Police: Unify to Optimize*, 11August 2007, Comunidad Segura.

an unmanageable number and seemingly impossible to guide and synchronize. In military circles, it is often said that when everyone is in charge, then nobody is in charge. Organizationally and given the complexity of the domestic security apparatus, President Calderon has no alternative but to leverage the only organization in which he has nearly singular control. That is the Mexican Army. Drastically compounding the domestic security problem is the issue of low pay. A Mexico City policeman will earn approximately 700 USD per month, but an office worker may earn 900 USD per month.<sup>19</sup> Drug cartels leverage low pay and offer “plato o plomo” or “silver or lead” which forces policemen to choose between taking a bribe or a bullet.<sup>20</sup>

## ANALYSIS

The situation in Mexico can best be described as an insurgency. Many believe that an insurgency may only be framed in the contemporary context of Iraq, Afghanistan, China, Vietnam or Algeria where there was a definitive goal to remove and replace the government. While the situations in those countries are or were certainly demonstrative of an insurgency, it is reasonable to attach that same characterization to Mexico. For purposes of clarity, an insurgency is defined as the organized use of subversion and violence by a group or movement that seeks to overthrow or force change of a governing authority.<sup>21</sup> When applied to Mexico, this falls directly in line with doctrine because Mexican anti-government forces only desire to gain freedom of movement.<sup>22</sup> There are clearly identified characteristics of an

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<sup>19</sup> Agnes G. Schaefer, Benjamin K. Bhaney, and Jack Riley, *Security In Mexico: Implications for U.S. Policy Options*, report (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 2009), 17

<sup>20</sup> Staff writer, *US: Targeted Officer Killings Crossing the Border?* , 14 December 2007. (Stratfor 2007): [http://www.stratfor.com/analysis/u\\_s\\_targeted\\_officer\\_killings\\_crossing\\_border](http://www.stratfor.com/analysis/u_s_targeted_officer_killings_crossing_border), (accessed 18 September 2010)

<sup>21</sup> United States., Joint Chiefs of Staff., Counterinsurgency Operations JP 3-24 (Washington, D.C.: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2009), GL-5.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., II-1

insurgency that range from ends to movement exhaustion. When analyzing the situation in Mexico a number of parallels can be neatly drawn that would clearly indicate an insurgency exists. Five characteristics of an insurgency apply to Mexico and they include desired ends, a dynamic, an organizational structure, an approach, active recruiting and information operations. There are two characteristics of an insurgency that are not applicable to Mexico at this time and they relate to a movements vulnerability and decline.

### **Ends**

The first characteristic of an insurgency is marked by having an end in mind.<sup>23</sup> Clearly, this is the case with Mexico. Criminal enterprises have an end in mind which is to gain and maintain freedom of movement. This means that they do not want to be subjected to interdiction by government forces or other criminal organizations particularly when marketing their products. These criminal enterprises, like insurgents, want and need freedom of movement if they are going to be successful. In December 2006, and shortly after President Calderon took office, the struggle against the drug cartels began, in earnest, which proved that his campaign rhetoric was translating to action.<sup>24</sup> Prior to his election, President Calderon promised, in a very public way, to tackle criminal enterprises. Drug cartels have also been known to publish clear objectives but they prefer to send messages in an unmistakably brazen manner.<sup>25</sup> For instance, shortly after being appointed as the Mexican States police chief, retired General Francisco Fernandez was the subject of an assassination attempt that killed his driver.<sup>26</sup> This targeted action was specifically designed to send a

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., II-4

<sup>24</sup> Barry R. McCaffrey Gen USA (Ret), *After Action Report Mexico 5-7 December 2008*, (29 December 2008), 3

<sup>25</sup> George W. Grayson, Mexico: Narco-violence and a Failed State? (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2010), 212.

<sup>26</sup> Banderas News, *The Cartel responds to Calderon*, March 2007, <http://banderasnews.com/0703/eded-the cartel responds.htm> (accessed 12 September 2010).

message to a Calderon administration and his political appointees. By this action and countless ones just like it, the drug cartels do not desire to take over the Mexican government; rather, they want to change the priorities of the elected and appointed leaders. In Mexico's case, the leaders of the criminal enterprises want to nullify the government in certain areas. Specifically, they want to operate in an unconstrained manner. On 21 September 2010, the leader of President Calderon's political party allegedly suggested entering into a pact with the cartels to reduce violence.<sup>27</sup> In this respect, the cartels are achieving their ends while appearing to gain legitimacy. This shows that the cartels are gaining the desired freedom of movement which falls in line with analysis and doctrine found in Joint Publication 3-24 (Counterinsurgency).

### **Dynamics, Organization, and Approaches**

The next three characteristics include the dynamics of an insurgency, their organization, and approaches.<sup>28</sup> There are seven major drug cartels operating within Mexico with countless splinter organizations below depending on whose analysis is used.<sup>29</sup> These cartels are headed by ruthless and charismatic individuals, who like any other regional or worldwide conglomerate, understand the requirement for and methods needed to achieve results. Drug cartels have a specific and well-defined organizational structure. One cartel, La Familia, has even published its operating principles which can be interpreted as commander's intent.<sup>30</sup> La Familia's approach is well developed and clearly crafted for mass public consumption.

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<sup>27</sup> Stratfor, *Mexico: Pacts With Criminal Organizations Needed-Official*, 21 September 2010. [http://www.stratfor.com/sitrep/20100921\\_mexico\\_pacts\\_crime...\\_needed\\_official](http://www.stratfor.com/sitrep/20100921_mexico_pacts_crime..._needed_official) (accessed 21 September 2010).

<sup>28</sup> United States., Joint Chiefs of Staff., Counterinsurgency Operations JP 3-24 (Washington, D.C.: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2009), II-06-21

<sup>29</sup> Colleen W. Cook, *Mexico's Drug Cartels*, Congressional Research Service, CRS Report for Congress, October 16, 2007. CRS - 1

<sup>30</sup> George W. Grayson, *Mexico: Narco-violence and a Failed State?* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2010), 212.

Specifically, they have portrayed themselves as the vanguard of the public in a struggle against corruption and governmental abuse.<sup>31</sup> While portraying themselves as protectors of the populace, they engage in horrific crimes to ensure nothing interferes with their profit centers.<sup>32</sup> All are dedicated to national and transnational shipment of their product to the largest consumer, the United States. In order to ensure their goods get to market, the cartels have established at least 46 locations within the U.S. to facilitate their illicit business model.<sup>33</sup> While Mexico is a large producer of marijuana and methamphetamines, they are also the prime transshipment point for cocaine destined for America but produced in South America.<sup>34</sup> Their reach, therefore, extends from North to South America in total. These criminal enterprises use direct and indirect approaches in order to gain and maintain their influence. Sometimes these criminal elements will murder politicians and security personnel because they have become roadblocks to their goals. Other times, these criminal elements will intimidate the Mexican civilian populace in order to prevent cooperation with the Mexican government. While cartels have become especially ruthless, they have permeated every aspect of the Mexican government. Because of this, many politicians and Mexican government officials have been co-opted by the cartels and are guided in their decisions by their very linkage with the organized criminal elements.<sup>35</sup> Reasonable people can disagree when addressing the question of the criminal element's influence that are levied on the Mexican political mechanism. That said, it is indisputable that the cartels are committed to

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 207

<sup>33</sup> Colleen W. Cook, *Mexico's Drug Cartels*, Congressional Research Service, CRS Report for Congress, October 16, 2007. CRS - 5

<sup>34</sup> Stephan Meiners, *Central America: An Emerging Role in the Drug Trade*, Stratfor.com, March 26, 2009, 1-2, <http://www.stratfor.com/print/134456?fn=9717006636> (accessed 18 September 2010).

<sup>35</sup> William Booth, *Mexico's Calderon: No Letup in Drive against Drug Cartels*, The Washington Post, September 3, 2009, [Http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/09/02/AR20090902820\\_p...](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/09/02/AR20090902820_p...)(accessed 27 August 2010).

using any means at their disposal to coerce, influence, or intimidate Mexican elected and appointed officials to advance their goals. For example, since 2006, 18 mayors have been assassinated and several others live across the border in the U.S. but travel to their offices during the day.<sup>36</sup> As described in Joint Publication 3-24, cartels utilize assassins as their street muscle.<sup>37</sup> When speaking in insurgent terms, this can be closely related to what is commonly referred to as a guerilla. The cartels themselves conduct day-to-day operations with the use of what is defined as a Cadre.<sup>38</sup> Put another way, this element ensures that the organization itself remains focused on goals and retains its discipline. In essence they are the middle management. Perhaps the most damaging element of the criminal enterprises is the auxiliary members.<sup>39</sup> These members cannot be identified because they operate under a veil of secrecy. Further, they act as the infection from within by collecting intelligence, crafting policy beneficial to the cartels while engaging in seemingly innocuous discourse designed to shape how the government and people view the cartels. Based on this analysis, the Mexican criminal enterprises fit the profile identified in Joint Publication 3-24.

### **Recruiting**

The next characteristic of an insurgency includes recruiting methods, rallying people to a cause, securing resources, and managing the information.<sup>40</sup> Cartels use a wide variety of methods to recruit members with a diversity of skills and situations to include local job

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<sup>36</sup> Nicole Ramos, “Local Officials From Tamaulipas Move to the U.S. Due to Recent Violence Against Mayors” *Justicemexico.org*, (1 October 2010): <http://justicemexico.org/2010/10/01/mayors-in-tamaulipas-move-to-u-s-as-rate-of-mayors-being-killed-increases/> (accessed 3 October 2010).

<sup>37</sup> United States., Joint Chiefs of Staff., Counterinsurgency Operations JP 3-24 (Washington, D.C.: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2009), II-18.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., II-22.

seekers, former military members, and criminals from both sides of the border.<sup>41</sup> The drug cartels prefer to recruit the willing but are certainly not averse to coercion or persuasion by violent means. President Calderon's war on criminality has also added another tool for the cartels use. Specifically, the Army's heavy handed approach to dealing with crime has allowed the cartels to leverage human rights abuses as a mechanism to recruit. Since the war on the cartels was declared by President Calderon in 2006, there has been a significant increase in the number of human rights complaints filed against the Mexican Army and as a result for the first time in history, the U.S. government withheld 26 million USD in aid.<sup>42</sup> Withholding funds was justified because the Army was using barbaric methods and torture against those suspected of being enemies of the state.<sup>43</sup> The cartels, like insurgencies, leverage alleged human rights abuses committed by the Army to sway public opinion. In fact, drug cartels organized protests against the Mexican Army demanding a pullout from areas under federal control in an effort to influence public opinion and source new recruits.<sup>44</sup> The cartels, like insurgencies, desire to remove their activity from the discussion and focus elsewhere, particularly if it serves their interests.

### **Information Operations**

With regard to managing information, the cartels acting similar to insurgents have been very effective. Since 2006, newspapers and journalists, in particular, have been the target of

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<sup>41</sup> George W. Grayson, Mexico: Narco-violence and a Failed State? (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2010), 62.

<sup>42</sup> Chris Hawley, *U.S. Punishes Mexico for human rights abuses*, USA Today, September 3, 2010. [http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2010-09-03-mexico-rights-abuses\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2010-09-03-mexico-rights-abuses_N.htm) (accessed 11 September 2010).

<sup>43</sup> George W. Grayson, Mexico: Narco-violence and a Failed State? (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2010), 31.

<sup>44</sup> David Luhnow and Jose De Cordoba, *The Perilous State of Mexico*, The Wall Street Journal, February 21 2009, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB123518102536038463.html> (accessed 12 September 2010).

the drug cartels.<sup>45</sup> Like insurgencies, the drug cartels understand the power of public opinion and it is not in their best interests to allow the press to report freely. As reported by Colleen Cook, a researcher who provided a report on drug cartels to the U.S. Congress during October 2007, drug cartels threatened two U.S. journalists reporting on the drug trade.<sup>46</sup> This forced two news agencies to take steps to protect the reporters. Additionally, in August 2010, it was reported that since President Calderon began his crime crackdown during 2006, 30 journalists have either been killed or are missing.<sup>47</sup> Further, during September 2010, the largest newspaper in Ciudad Juarez placed an open letter to the drug cartels following the murder of one of its journalists. In the open letter the newspaper editor wrote “we ask you to explain what you want from us, what we should try to publish, or not publish, so we know what to expect.”<sup>48</sup> This is evidence that the cartel’s information operations are effective. Finally, drug cartels have used extreme methods like beheadings that have had an unmistakable psychological affect that have resulted in keeping friends in line while influencing, foes, political leaders, government institutions, and everybody else in-between.<sup>49</sup>

### **What is Northern Command Capable of Providing?**

Since the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001, the U.S. has built a significant brain trust with regard to counter-insurgency. While every insurgency is different, one fact is clear, counterinsurgency training and execution focuses less on what to think and more on

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<sup>45</sup> George W. Grayson, *Mexico: Narco-violence and a Failed State?* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2010), 271.

<sup>46</sup> Colleen W. Cook, *Mexico's Drug Cartels*, Congressional Research Service, CRS Report for Congress, October 16, 2007 p. CRS - 11

<sup>47</sup> Marine Forces North, *Weekly Information Summary*, 20 August 2010, p 8-9

<sup>48</sup> CBS."Paper to Cartel: What Do You Want Us to Publish? - CBS News," Breaking News Headlines: Business, Entertainment & World News - CBS News, September 20, 2010, accessed September 20, 2010, <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2010/09/20/world/main6884454.shtml>

<sup>49</sup> Loan Grillo, *Behind Mexico's Wave of Beheadings*, September 08, 2008, Time Magazine, <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1839576,00.html> (accessed 12 September 2010).

how to think, because success depends on adapting to a very nimble enemy.<sup>50</sup>

Counterinsurgency training and execution is a distinctly interpersonal human affair, which focuses more on developing people than on using material to accomplish objectives. While the U.S. government<sup>51</sup> and USNORTHCOM are very active in its Mexican engagement efforts, offering counterinsurgency training to the Mexican military would provide them with the tools required to gain momentum. This training could provide the Mexican military with a different operating philosophy that would provide the other elements of Mexican and American power (Diplomatic, Information, and Economic) with the time and space to focus on the overall security issue. Additionally, USNORTHCOM has access to and the ability to leverage training bases and Mobile Training Teams (MTT). This access would provide USNORTHCOM with the ability to host Mexican military training within the continental U.S. (CONUS) or the capability to send unarmed MTT's to Mexico. CONUS based training and education is currently being offered to selected members of the Mexican military. Additionally, U.S. military MTT's have been dispatched to Mexico to facilitate a shared understanding between militaries.<sup>52</sup> Clearly a precedent for contact has been established and it would be a good idea to offer counterinsurgency training to the Mexican military principally and preferably within CONUS for a multitude of reasons. Specifically, training should be offered to the Mexican military that focuses on a proven strategy of "Clear, Hold, Build".<sup>53</sup> The first leg of training offered would be "Clearing." This training would allow Mexican military personnel to use techniques to clear criminal elements from targeted

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<sup>50</sup> United States., Joint Chiefs of Staff., Counterinsurgency Operations JP 3-24 (Washington, D.C.: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2009), ix.

<sup>51</sup> George W. Grayson, Mexico: Narco-violence and a Failed State? (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2010), 238.

<sup>52</sup> United States Marine Corps, *After Action Report on USMC and Mexican Marines Squad Leader Training in Campeche Mexico*, 23 January 2010.

<sup>53</sup> United States., Department of the Army, Counterinsurgency FM 3-24 (Washington, D.C.: Dept. of the Army, 2006), 5-18.

areas.<sup>54</sup> The second leg of the training should focus on the holding strategy. This demonstrates to the civilian populace that the government will not abandon them thus allowing the criminal elements or “insurgents” to return.<sup>55</sup> The third leg of the training focuses on building.<sup>56</sup> Using this strategy, U.S. forces would train the Mexican military on strategies to build on the gains made during the clear and hold phases. The goal of this training is to make the Mexican people part of the solution by resisting the influence of the cartels.

The next part of training offered to the Mexican military is critical because it focuses on getting the counterinsurgent’s message to the public. Effective use of messaging will ultimately assist in increasing stability within Mexico. Currently, the criminal insurgent elements have the momentum and are driving the message. The Mexican military needs training on how to get their message out to the public. By receiving this type of training, the Mexican military will begin to turn public opinion and support against the cartels and toward the government forces. Finally, Mexican military personnel need to understand what “winning” looks like. Because of the inherent criminal basis behind Mexico’s presumed insurgency, it is unlikely that Mexican military personnel will wake one day and declare that the major criminal elements have been defeated. Rather, Mexican military personnel will know that they have succeeded when violence and instability are contained to manageable numbers. In essence, the Mexican military must realize what the U.S. military realizes about the recent insurgent fights in Iraq and Afghanistan. Future conflicts, are less likely to include sweeping maneuvers and more likely to be fought over public perception.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 5-19

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 5- 19-20

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 5- 20-21

<sup>57</sup> Robert H Scales, *World War IV*, Armed Forces Journal, (July 2006), 4.

## **U.S. Northern Command's Equity**

In 2002, USNORTHCOM was created and assigned as the Department of Defense's complement to Homeland Security with a responsible area that includes Canada, the United States, Mexico and 500 nautical miles of water space extending from CONUS.<sup>58</sup> As a result, USNORTHCOM assumed responsibility for securing, establishing, and maintaining those relationships required to enhance or maintain U.S security. The mission of USNORTHCOM is to anticipate and conduct homeland defense and civil support operations within the assigned area of responsibility to defend, protect, and secure the U.S. and its interests.<sup>59</sup> To date that mission has not substantially changed. Given the situation in Mexico and the potentially negative impact to the U.S., USNORTHCOM working in concert with other government agencies, is the appropriately responsible military agency for engaging the Mexican military through the U.S. Department of State particularly in matters of homeland security. More importantly, it has been reported that terrorist organizations like Hezbollah, an Iranian proxy, have established roots in Mexico in order to attend to a wide variety of interests to include those that are income producing.<sup>60</sup> Hence, it is reasonable to assume that should relations between the U.S. and Iran further deteriorate, Hezbollah networks in Mexico could be used as an enabling function for Islamic terrorists to cross the border to carry out attacks on American soil.<sup>61</sup> Most disturbingly, Mexican drug cartels have established links with Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13), an ultra-violent and mercenary transnational gang devoted to a wide variety of illicit criminal activities ranging from human smuggling to drug

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<sup>58</sup> Steve Bowman and James Crowhurst, *Homeland Security: Evolving Roles and Missions for United States Northern Command*, (November 16, 2006),1.

<sup>59</sup> Joint Task Force North, *Joint Task Force North Overview*, (July 2009), 3.

<sup>60</sup> Scott Stewart, *Hezbollah, Radical but Rational*, Stratfor Security Weekly, (12 August 2010),

[http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/20100811\\_hezbollah\\_radical\\_rational](http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/20100811_hezbollah_radical_rational) (accessed 28 August 2010)

<sup>61</sup> John C. McKay, *A Frontier Aflame*, Proceedings, (October 2010), 47.

trafficking.<sup>62</sup> It is suspected, but not proven, that MS-13 and al Qaeda have had contact and the fear remains that al-Qaeda could leverage MS-13's expertise and transnational contacts to smuggle dangerous cargo or personnel into CONUS.<sup>63</sup>

### **Methods**

USNORTHCOM must be very delicate when offering training to the Mexican military. First, the Mexican military is a proud institution and among the most respected within Mexico.<sup>64</sup> This means that any offer cannot be made under a superior- inferior construct. Next, USNORTHCOM needs to be acutely aware of the long and well chronicled history between the U.S. and Mexico. Given Mexican perceptions of past U.S. imperialistic designs, it would be most preferable to offer counterinsurgency training within CONUS instead of Mexico. Mexicans are naturally suspicious of the U.S. and the presence of military personnel within their country would, more than likely, not be well received. Further, the presence of U.S. uniformed personnel would provide a rich counter-message for the criminal elements. Critically important is that on 18 August 2009, President Calderon stated that Mexico would "never" accept U.S. soldiers on its territory.<sup>65</sup> Clearly, President Calderon's words were meant for Mexican domestic consumption and should not be taken literally. The U.S. has conducted military to military contact within Mexico but it has been conducted without U.S. uniformed services being armed.<sup>66</sup> Locating training within CONUS would also provide a stable environment for the Mexican military to learn and focus without fear of being targeted. However, USNORTHCOM must be sensitive to perception that U.S. institutions, like the

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<sup>62</sup> Fred Burton, *Mara Salvatrucha: The New Face of Organized Crime?* Stratfor Global Intelligence, 30 March 2006. [http://www.stratfor.com/mara\\_salvatrucha\\_new\\_face\\_organized\\_crime](http://www.stratfor.com/mara_salvatrucha_new_face_organized_crime) (accessed 18 September 2010).

<sup>63</sup> Richard Norton, *Feral Cities: Problems Today, Battlefields Tomorrow?*, Marine Corps University Journal, (Spring 2010),69.

<sup>64</sup> Barry R. McCaffrey Gen (Ret), *After Action Report Mexico 5-7 December 2008*, (29 December 2008), 7.

<sup>65</sup> Stratfor, *Mexico: No US Soldiers in Mexico-Calderon*, 18 August 2009.

<sup>66</sup> Major Ruben Gutierrez, *Interview on the After Action Report Mexican Military Contact - January 2010*. Camp Pendleton, Ca. 14 September 2010.

School of Americas, have trained a fair number of Latin American's who have been accused of human rights abuses.<sup>67</sup> Next, USNORTHCOM needs to establish contact with the Mexican military in a way that fully appreciates the fact that the military is only one arm of the “whole of government” approach. In essence, the U.S. military is not the solution but rather an enabler and a supporting effort to the Diplomatic, Informational, and Economic levers of the U.S. government. Finally, USNORTHCOM needs a unified message for all military personnel interacting with Mexican military personnel. This will assist to synchronize the message and desired outcomes of that interaction.

### **COUNTERARGUMENTS AND REBUTTALS**

On 8 September 2010, when appearing before the Council of Foreign Relations, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said that the drug cartels were beginning to look like an insurgency based on similarities with Colombia 20 years earlier.<sup>68</sup> This brought a rapid response from the Mexican government. Alejandro Poire, a Mexican National Security spokesman, stated that the Mexican government did not share Mrs. Clinton's opinion because the Colombian situation was different than Mexico's.<sup>69</sup> Mr. Poire amplified by stating that 20 years ago, Colombia did not have control of 40% of their country and Mexico is nowhere near that level. Additionally, Mr. Poire pointed out that the criminal elements in both Mexico and Colombia feed off of the U.S.'s insatiable appetite for drugs which is accurate but there are differing opinions. For instance there has been much discussion regarding the kind of insurgency that Mexico is facing. When put into the context of a traditional Maoist

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<sup>67</sup> Richard F. Grimmett and Mark P. Sullivan, *U.S. Army School of the Americas: Background and Congressional Concerns*, Congressional Research Service, CRS Report for Congress, August 2, 2000. CRS - 3

<sup>68</sup> Paul Richter and Ken Dilanian, *Clinton says Mexico drug wars starting to look like insurgency*, LATimes, September 09, 2010 <http://articles.latimes.com/2010/sep/09/world/la-fg-mexico-insurgency-20100909>

<sup>69</sup> Agence France-Presse, "Clinton Remarks on Mexico Unrest Misunderstood: US Official," September 09, 2010, <http://hello.news352.lu/edito-68655-clinton-remarks-on-mexico-unrest-misunderstood-us-official.html?p=movies>. (accessed 9 September 2010).

insurgency that calls for a wholesale change to the fundamental form of government, it is reasonable to find agreement with Mr. Poire. That said, others have raised reasonable questions regarding Mexico's slip into a "drug insurgency" solely because of the absence of a desire to topple the government.<sup>70</sup> When comparing Secretary Clinton's analysis against Mr. Poire's it is clear that Secretary Clinton's interpretation of an insurgency falls in line with the U.S. Department of Defense's definition. This is due to the fact that the Department of Defense's definition highlights a desire to force a change in governance and not necessarily the replacement of a government.<sup>71</sup>

Interestingly, in March 2010, the U.S. received 2,816 political asylum petitions from Mexican citizens and granted residency status to 62.<sup>72</sup> While vehemently opposed to Clinton's description of the Mexican problem on 8 September 2010, about one month earlier on 5 August 2010, President Calderon made a startling admission. Specifically he stated that Mexican drug gangs sought to replace the state to include government officials, researchers and religious leaders.<sup>73</sup> Even the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff has referred to the Mexican issue in the context of a counter-insurgency.<sup>74</sup> Following a meeting with his Mexican counterparts in 2009, Admiral Mullen stated that the U.S. military could provide counterinsurgency assistance to Mexico in ways similarly used in Iraq and Afghanistan. Another counterargument is that a military is not the best suited for policing because they

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<sup>70</sup> Ignacio de los Reyes, *Is Mexico at Threat from a Drug Insurgency?*, BBC News Latin America & Caribbean, September 9, 2010. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-11241147>

<sup>71</sup> United States., Joint Chiefs of Staff., Counterinsurgency Operations JP 3-24 (Washington, D.C.: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2009), GL-6.

<sup>72</sup> U.S. Department of Justice Executive Office for Immigration Review, *FY 2009 Asylum Statistics*, March 2010.

<sup>73</sup> Staff writer, *Calderon: Mexico Drug Gangs Seeking to Replace State*, BBC News Latin America & Caribbean, August 5, 2010. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-10877156>

<sup>74</sup> David Morgan, *US Military Chief Backs Counter-Insurgency for Mexico*, Reuters, March 6, 2009, <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSN06397194>

tend to have an offensive mindset while lacking in community based skills.<sup>75</sup> In Mexico's case, President Calderon has no other choice based on the complete criminal infiltration of policing institutions.<sup>76</sup> This means that USNORTHCOM's efforts should be focused towards the Mexican military, initially, in order to stabilize the current deteriorating environment.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

First, in keeping with this report's thesis, USNORTHCOM should offer counterinsurgency training to the Mexican military in order to increase stability within Mexico. Second, U.S. military and political leaders should not become bogged down over the definition of an insurgency and its relationship to Mexico. Simply put, the cartels are using insurgent ways and means to achieve their ends. Therefore, USNORTHCOM should avoid being overly pedantic when categorizing the situation in Mexico for fear of being indelicate. Wars, conflicts and other incidents in 2010 and beyond are unlikely to fit within typically neat and tidy categories. Future adversaries will evolve and appear different tomorrow than they do today.<sup>77</sup> This means that USNORTHCOM should approach the Mexican issue as unique and deserving of its own operational design. Third, USNORTHCOM must develop a unified vision that is fully nested with other elements of the U.S. government. Critical to this effort is to generate guidance which would transcend changes in U.S. political leadership. Specifically, USNORTHCOM must promulgate a vision that is understood by all elements that have any interaction with any arm of the Mexican government. This is done in order to assuage Mexican concerns relative to the issues that germinated from the Mexican American

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<sup>75</sup> Dennis Keller, *U.S. Military Forces and Police Assistance in Stability Operations: The Least Worst Option to fill the U.S. Capacity Gap*, Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute, (August 2010),38.

<sup>76</sup> Agnes G. Schaefer, Benjamin K. Bhaney, and Jack Riley, *Security In Mexico: Implications for U.S. Policy Options*, report (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 2009), 4

<sup>77</sup> Thomas X. Hammes, *The Sling and the Stone: on War in the 21st Century* (St. Paul, MN: Zenith Press, 2006), 207.

War. Fourth, it is critical to assemble a “Green Team” that consists of policy makers from USNORTHCOM, other Department of Defense agencies responsible for providing COIN training to Mexicans, the U.S. State Department, and other government agencies that interact with the Mexican government. The goal of this “Green Team” would be to provide USNORTHCOM with evolving recommendations related to the Command’s message. Finally, USNORTHCOM should gain a complete appreciation for all Mexican engagement efforts by coordinating and approving all Mexican military contact. Further, this means ensuring that all military engagements relative to Mexico are executed with a specific goal in mind that addresses the Commander’s objective which would contribute to Mexican stability.

## **CONCLUSION**

Mexican stability is critical to U.S. security and some believe that U.S. national priorities should be redirected to Mexico from Afghanistan and Iraq.<sup>78</sup> Instability in Mexico translates into instability especially on the U.S. Southwestern border. The current security emergency cannot be ignored or wished away. With an estimated 2009 Hispanic population of about 30 million, it would be nearly impossible for this nation to affect an isolationist policy. Further, there are others that are deeply concerned that Mexico could become a failed state with the implications to the U.S. being enormous.<sup>79</sup> If Mexico were to fail, the U.S. military commitment would be historic, particularly given the geographic proximity to the U.S. homeland. USNORTHCOM, established in 2002, was designated as the command responsible for working with the Department of Homeland Security to ensure security of the

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<sup>78</sup> Robert J. Bunker, *The U.S. Strategic Imperative Must Shift From Iraq/Afghanistan to Mexico/The Americas and the Stabilization of Europe*, Small Wars Journal, 7 October 2010.<http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/2010/10/the-us-strategic-imperative-mu/> (accessed 07 October 2010).

<sup>79</sup> George W. Grayson, *Mexico: Narco-violence and a Failed State?* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2010), 267.

homeland. USNORTHCOM is the right command to address the Mexican instability issue and the best positioned command with the focus, organizational structure, and leadership required to tackle a challenge of this nature. USNORTHCOM's goal needs to be centered on assisting the Mexican military to prevent further instability and deterioration. This role would be a supporting one. In this sense, USNORTHCOM is a critical element, but not the sole element, required to assist Mexico in the quest for stability.

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